



Legacy Business Registry Staff Report

Hearing Date: April 25, 2022

FAR EAST CAFÉ

Application No.: LBR-2016-17-056
Business Name: Far East Café
Business Address: 631 Grant Ave.
District: District 3
Applicant: Bill Lee, President
Nomination Letter Date: January, 20, 2017
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Staff Contact: Richard Kurylo
legacybusiness@sfgov.org

BUSINESS DESCRIPTION

Far East Café is a Chinese restaurant and banquet hall located at 631 Grant Avenue in San Francisco's Chinatown neighborhood. Established in 1920 in an era when banquet halls were quite common, Far East Café is now the last remaining restaurant of its kind in the neighborhood. Little is known about the restaurant's early owners, but it was run by Hing C. Tse from 1979 to 1999. Since then, the restaurant has been owned and operated by Bill Lee, who proudly carries on Far East Café's legacy, ensuring future generations of Chinatown residents have access to a large venue where they can gather and keep traditions alive.

Far East Café has served the Chinatown community for more than a century. Its grand interior and 800-person capacity have made it an ideal venue for almost any special occasion. Over the years it has hosted weddings, community meetings, fundraisers, and holiday celebrations, allowing friends and family to gather around large tables and delight in Cantonese and Szechwan cuisine. When patrons enter through the doorway, they encounter an ornate dining room that features a dragon-shaped gateway, Kingfisher chandeliers from the Qing dynasty, carved screens, and painted murals. Much of the artwork displayed was brought over from China more than a century ago.

Far East Café is an informal hub of neighborhood community life where residents gather for events like Lunar New Year and the annual Miss Chinatown Pageant. Over the years, the restaurant has also committed to hiring recent immigrants, teaching them new job skills and supporting them as they advance in their careers. Additionally, Far East Café purchases its ingredients from local Chinatown merchants, helping to support other local businesses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the restaurant also advocated for the health and safety of the Chinatown community and participated in the Feed & Fuel program, which provided meals for vulnerable residents.

CRITERION 1

Has the applicant operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?

Yes, Far East Café has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years:

631 Grant Avenue from 1920 to Present (102 Years)

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City Hall Room 140
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102
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www.legacybusiness.org





CRITERION 2

Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?

Yes, Far East Café has contributed to the history and identity of the Chinatown neighborhood and San Francisco.

The Historic Preservation Commission recommended the applicant as qualifying, noting the following ways the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community:

- The business is associated with Cantonese and Szechwan cuisine as well as the tradition of Chinese banquet halls. Additionally, the interior of Far East Café features culturally significant decorations including Kingfisher lanterns from the Qing Dynasty and antique artwork that was brought over from China more than a century ago.
- The Grant Avenue property is located within the National Register-eligible Chinatown Historic District. The district is significant for its association with the Chinese and Chinese American community in San Francisco, and for its unique architectural character. The business is also associated with prominent community leader Look Tin Sing, who advocated for the reconstruction of Chinatown and helped define the area's new architectural, commercial, and cultural identity following the 1906 Earthquake and Fire.

Although the building is not currently listed on a historic resource registry, it is on the Planning Department's Article 10 Landmark Work Program. The property has also been evaluated during several historic resource surveys. As part of the National Register Survey (1997), the property was identified as an eligible contributor to the National Register-eligible Chinatown Historic District and received a survey rating of "3D." During the Chinatown Survey (1994), the property was identified as a district contributor. And in the Foundation for San Francisco Architectural Heritage Survey (1978), the property received a rating of "Major Importance."

- Far East Café was identified as a candidate for the Legacy Business Registry in a draft of the Chinese American Citywide Historic Context Statement.
- Far East Café has been featured in numerous print and online publications including the San Francisco Chronicle and NBC News. The restaurant received extensive coverage when it announced it would close its doors in 2021 due to the difficulty of operating during the COVID-19 pandemic. Luckily, an outpouring of support from the local community and government helped ensure that Far East Café could keep its doors open.

CRITERION 3

Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?

Yes, Far East Café is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RECOMMENDATION

The Historic Preservation Commission recommends that Far East Café qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) and recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions.

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Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Exterior architectural features of the building including:
 - Terracotta roof with upturned eaves.
 - Cornice with block medallions.
 - Windows encased by pilasters and triangular capitals.
- Interior features including:
 - Kingfisher chandeliers from Qing Dynasty.
 - Original private dining booths.
 - Chinese paintings and murals.
 - Dragon gateway.
- Capacity to host large banquets serving traditional Cantonese cuisine.

CORE PHYSICAL FEATURE OR TRADITION THAT DEFINES THE BUSINESS

Following is the core physical feature or tradition that defines the business that would be required for maintenance of the business on the Legacy Business Registry.

- Restaurant and banquet hall featuring Chinese cuisine.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the San Francisco Small Business Commission include Far East Café currently located at 631 Grant Ave. in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
Legacy Business Program

Legacy Business Program

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Small Business Commission

Resolution No. _____

April 25, 2022

FAR EAST CAFÉ

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Adopting findings approving the Legacy Business Registry application for Far East Café, currently located at 631 Grant Ave.

WHEREAS, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; or

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for more than 20 years but less than 30 years, has had no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years, has significantly contributed to the history or identity of a particular neighborhood or community and, if not included on the Registry, faces a significant risk of displacement; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has contributed to the neighborhood's history and identity; and

WHEREAS, the subject business is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the business; and

WHEREAS, at a duly noticed public hearing held on April 25, 2022, the San Francisco Small Business Commission reviewed documents and correspondence, and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry application; therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission hereby includes Far East Café in the Legacy Business Registry as a Legacy Business under Administrative Code Section 2A.242.

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BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission recommends safeguarding the below listed physical features and traditions at Far East Café.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Exterior architectural features of the building including:
 - Terracotta roof with upturned eaves.
 - Cornice with block medallions.
 - Windows encased by pilasters and triangular capitals.
- Interior features including:
 - Kingfisher chandeliers from Qing Dynasty.
 - Original private dining booths.
 - Chinese paintings and murals.
 - Dragon gateway.
- Capacity to host large banquets serving traditional Cantonese cuisine.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Small Business Commission requires maintenance of the below listed core physical feature or tradition to maintain Far East Café on the Legacy Business Registry:

- Restaurant and banquet hall featuring Chinese cuisine.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was ADOPTED by the Small Business Commission on April 25, 2022.

Katy Tang
Director

RESOLUTION NO. _____

Ayes –
Nays –
Abstained –
Absent –

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Legacy Business Registry

Application Review Sheet

Application No.: LBR-2016-17-056
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CRITERION 1: Has the applicant has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years?

☒ Yes ☐ No

631 Grant Avenue from 1920 to Present (102 Years)

CRITERION 2: Has the applicant contributed to the neighborhood's history and/or the identity of a particular neighborhood or community?

☒ Yes ☐ No

CRITERION 3: Is the applicant committed to maintaining the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms?

☒ Yes ☐ No

NOTES: N/A

DELIVERY DATE TO HPC: March 9, 2022

Richard Kurylo and Michelle Reynolds
Legacy Business Program

Legacy Business Program

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Member, Board of Supervisors
District 3



City and County of San Francisco

AARON PESKIN
佩斯金 市參事

January 20, 2017

Director Regina Dick-Endrizzi
San Francisco Office of Small Business
City Hall, Room 110
1 Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett Place
San Francisco, CA 94102

Dear Director Dick-Endrizzi:

It is my honor and privilege to nominate the Far East Cafe located at 631 Grant Avenue for inclusion on the Legacy Business Registry.

The Far East Cafe first opened its doors in 1920. For nearly one-hundred years, Far East Cafe has served Cantonese & Szechuan cuisine amid traditional antique Chinese décor to the delight of San Franciscans and tourists alike. The Far East Café is well known for its excellent hosting of Family Association banquets and is a cornerstone of the Chinatown culinary experience.

The Far East Cafe would benefit greatly from being added to the Legacy Business Registry, and I look forward to its inclusion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Aaron Peskin".

Aaron Peskin

Section One:

Business / Applicant Information.

Please provide the following information:

- The name, mailing address and other contact information of the business;
- The name of the person who owns the business. For businesses with multiple owners, identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business;
- The name, title and contact information of the applicant;
- The business's San Francisco Business Account Number and entity number with the Secretary of State, if applicable.

NAME OF BUSINESS:	
Far East Cafe (Hong Nin Holdings Corporation)	
BUSINESS OWNER(S) (Identify the person(s) with the highest ownership stake in the business):	
Bill Lee	
CURRENT BUSINESS ADDRESS:	TELEPHONE NUMBER:
631 Grant Ave San Francisco, CA 94108	415-982-3245
	EMAIL ADDRESS:
	fareastcafe@pacbell.net
MAILING ADDRESS – STREET ADDRESS:	MAILING ADDRESS – CITY AND STATE:
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Same as Business Address	
	MAILING ADDRESS – ZIP CODE:
WEBSITE ADDRESS:	
fareastcafesf.com	
FACEBOOK PAGE:	
www.facebook.com/Far-East-Cafe-872818932820885/	
TWITTER NAME:	
APPLICANT'S NAME:	APPLICANT'S TELEPHONE NUMBER:
Bill Lee	
APPLICANT'S TITLE:	APPLICANT'S EMAIL ADDRESS:
President	fareastcafe@pacbell.net
SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS ACCOUNT NUMBER:	
0331691	
SECRETARY OF STATE ENTITY NUMBER (If applicable):	
C2076295	

Section Two:

Business Location(s).

List the business address of the original San Francisco location, the start date of business and the dates of operation at the original location. Check the box indicating whether the original location of the business in San Francisco is the founding location of the business. If the business moved from its original location and has had additional addresses in San Francisco, identify all other addresses and the dates of operation at each address. For businesses with more than one location, list the additional locations in section three of the narrative.

ORIGINAL SAN FRANCISCO ADDRESS	ZIP CODE	START DATE OF BUSINESS
631 Grant Avenue	94108	1920
IS THIS LOCATION THE FOUNDING LOCATION OF THE BUSINESS?	DATES OF OPERATION AT THIS LOCATION	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	1920 - Present	

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

OTHER ADDRESSES (If applicable)	ZIP CODE	DATES OF OPERATION
		Start:
		End:

Section Three:

Disclosure Statement.

San Francisco Taxes, Business Registration, Licenses, Labor Laws and Public Information Release.

This section is verification that all San Francisco taxes, business registration and licenses are current and complete, and there are no current violations of San Francisco labor laws. This information will be verified. A business deemed not current with all San Francisco taxes, business registration and licenses, or has current violations of San Francisco labor laws, will not be eligible to apply for grants through the Legacy Business Program.

In addition, we are required to inform you that all information provided in the application will become subject to disclosure under the California Public Records Act.

Please read the following statements and check each to indicate that you agree with the statement. Then sign below in the space provided.

- ☒ I am authorized to submit this application on behalf of the business.
- ☒ I attest that the business is current on all of its San Francisco tax obligations.
- ☒ I attest that the business's business registration and any applicable regulatory license(s) are current.
- ☒ I attest that the Office of Labor Standards and Enforcement (OLSE) has not determined that the business is currently in violation of any of the City's labor laws, and that the business does not owe any outstanding penalties or payments ordered by the OLSE.
- ☒ I understand that documents submitted with this application may be made available to the public for inspection and copying pursuant to the California Public Records Act and San Francisco Sunshine Ordinance.
- ☒ I hereby acknowledge and authorize that all photographs and images submitted as part of the application may be used by the City without compensation.
- ☒ I understand that the Small Business Commission may revoke the placement of the business on the Registry if it finds that the business no longer qualifies, and that placement on the Registry does not entitle the business to a grant of City funds.

Bill Lee

02/18/2022

Bill Lee

Name (Print):

Date:

Signature:

FAR EAST CAFÉ

Section 4: Written Historical Narrative

CRITERION 1

a. Provide a short history of the business from the date the business opened in San Francisco to the present day, including the ownership history. For businesses with multiple locations, include the history of the original location in San Francisco (including whether it was the business's founding and or headquartered location) and the opening dates and locations of all other locations.

Far East Café was established in 1920 at 631 Grant Avenue in San Francisco's Chinatown. The restaurant is the oldest banquet-style Chinese restaurant in Chinatown.

The architectural designs of Far East Café's building were influenced by a Chinese American merchant Look Tin Sing, who played a major role in leading the community in rebuilding Chinatown after the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. The building's interior appears to be one of the last Chinese restaurants that included original ornamentations that were directly imported from Canton in 1910.

The building originally hosted the Wang Sing Lung & Company from 1909 to 1915. The northern section of the building is still operating under the historic name "Shanghai Bazaar."

Ownership of Far East Café has changed multiple times since 1920, but the service and its original decor have always remained the same. Hing C. Tse became the owner of the business in 1979. The latest owner of Far East Café, Bill Lee, took over in 1999. Bill is a prominent community leader who continues to work hard keeping the doors of Far East Café open and carry this tradition for generations to come.

Since the closing of Four Seas Restaurant and the Empress of China in Chinatown, the Far East Café is the only remaining banquet-style Chinese restaurant in the area. New Asia Restaurant is currently closed, and its property will be converted into low income housing for the community.

b. Describe any circumstances that required the business to cease operations in San Francisco for more than six months?

The COVID-19 pandemic forced Far East Café to be closed for approximately 6 months during 2020 due to health and safety concerns. The business was able to open at a limited capacity and for take-out as mandated by the local health agency guidelines.

c. Is the business a family-owned business? If so, give the generational history of the business.

N/A

d. Describe the ownership history when the business ownership is not the original owner or a family-owned business.

The owners of Far East Café prior to 1979 are unknown because there were many shareholders. The ownership history of the restaurant is as follows:

1920 to 1979:	Ownership Unknown, Yung Tung Low Restaurant DBA Far East Café
1979 to 1999:	Hing C. Tse, Owner of Yung Tung Low, Inc. DBA Far East Café
1999 to Present:	Bill Lee, Owner of Hong Nin Holding Corporation DBA Far East Café

e. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30 years, the applicant will need to provide documentation of the existence of the business prior to current ownership to verify it has been in operation for 30+ years. Please use the list of supplemental documents and/or materials as a guide to help demonstrate the existence of the business prior to current ownership.

Documentation of the existence of the business verifying it has been in operation for 30+ years is provided in this Legacy Business Registry application.

f. Note any other special features of the business location, such as, if the property associated with the business is listed on a local, state, or federal historic resources registry.

The historic resource status of the building at 631 Grant Avenue is classified by the Planning Department as Category A, Historic Resource Present, with regard to the California Environmental Quality Act. The building, known as Shanghai Bazaar, was constructed in 1908. Lillora Canfield was the owner (from 1906 to 1909). The canopy is still in its original design, and the north side of the interior is still intact. The building was surveyed in 1978, 1994, and 1997, and it was found to be a contributing building of major importance. It appears to be eligible for the National Register as a contributor to a National Register-eligible district.

CRITERION 2

a. Describe the business's contribution to the history and/or identity of the neighborhood, community or San Francisco.

Far East Café is the oldest and last remaining banquet-style Chinese restaurants in Chinatown, dating back to 1920. Banquet-style cuisine includes different family style dishes that serves a table of 8-10 people, allowing everyone seated at the table to enjoy the food together and socialize as a family. Banquets are often held in restaurants with the capacity to host large events such as community gatherings.

The restaurant was built through the leadership of Look Tin Sing, who played a major role in leading the community in rebuilding Chinatown after the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. The block of Grant Avenue between California and Sacramento streets was one of the first to be rebuilt after the earthquake and fire. It is a significant area that visualized the aspirations of Chinese American leaders and merchants in designing Chinatown into an Oriental City in order to save it

from being relocated to Hunter's Point. Most buildings on this block feature the typical Oriental style with classical architectural languages and were all constructed by Western architects.

The building's interior appears to be one of the last remnants of Chinese restaurants that included original ornamentations that were directly imported from Canton in the 1910s. As you step into the restaurant through the enchanted dragon gateway, you will experience the grandeur of the Orient as you gaze up on the antique palace chandeliers that beautifully light up the painted murals and carved screens.

b. Is the business (or has been) associated with significant events in the neighborhood, the city, or the business industry?

Far East Café's grand ballroom has been a popular destination place for hosting receptions, banquets, special events, and business meetings for both the Chinatown community and San Franciscans at large for generations. It has hosted many prominent events that included fundraisers for dignitaries such as mayors Dianne Feinstein, Gavin Newsom, Ed Lee, and our current Mayor London Breed. It also hosted the 2015 national Mayors' Conference.

Far East Cafe had become a popular destination for Lunar New Year celebrations and a venue for the annual Miss Chinatown Pageant Show, and has the capacity to host up to 800 guests with 15,000 square foot of space that has been unchanged since the restaurant opened in 1920.

The restaurant has been continuously involved in serving the needs of the community, even throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite all the health and safety mandates from the coronavirus pandemic, they remained open to serve the needs of the community. The restaurant participated in the Feed & Fuel Program, and was also one of the few restaurants that offered meals to community, hoping to help minimize communal kitchen use during the surge of the pandemic. The owner, Bill Lee, also advocated for more assistance and resources from our local leaders that the Chinatown businesses desperately needed to help navigate through the pandemic.

c. Has the business ever been referenced in an historical context? Such as in a business trade publication, media, or historical documents?

Far East Café has been referenced in numerous publications over the years, particularly before and during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and 2021. Some articles include the following:

- "100-Year-Old Chinatown Spot With Curtained Booths, Far East Cafe, In Danger of Closing"
SFist
December 23, 2020
<https://sfist.com/2020/12/23/100-year-old-chinatown-spot-with-curtained-booths-far-east-cafe-closes/>

- “SF City Leaders Hope to Save 100-Year-Old Landmark Restaurant”
NBC Bay Area
December 24, 2020
<https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/san-francisco/sf-city-leaders-hope-to-save-100-year-old-landmark-restaurant/2430894/>
- “The last stand of S.F. Chinatown's storied banquet halls”
San Francisco Chronicle
February 2021
<https://www.sfchronicle.com/culture/article/The-last-stand-of-S-F-Chinatown-s-storied-15943375.php>
- “Far East Cafe owners decide to keep 100-year-old S.F. Chinatown restaurant alive”
San Francisco Chronicle
March 3, 2021
<https://www.sfchronicle.com/food/article/Far-East-Cafe-owners-decide-to-keep-100-year-old-15995381.php>
- “100-Year-Old Chinatown Banquet Hall Is Saved”
Eater San Francisco
March 4, 2021
<https://sf.eater.com/2021/3/4/22313835/far-east-cafe-carlotta-brown>
- “Will Chinatown restaurants that function as community hubs be a thing of the past?”
KTVU Fox 2
May 14, 2021
<https://www.ktvu.com/news/will-chinatown-restaurants-that-function-as-community-hubs-be-a-thing-of-the-past>
- “SF's Chinatown Businesses Welcomes Back Tourists After COVID-19 Closure”
NBC Bay Area
July 9, 2021
<https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/sfs-chinatown-businesses-welcoming-back-tourists-after-covid-19-closure/2590668/>
- “What Happens if Chinatowns Don’t Survive”
Slate
September 22, 2021
<https://slate.com/business/2021/09/chinatowns-are-struggling-delta-has-decimated-business-once-again.html>

d. Is the business associated with a significant or historical person?

The rebuilding of Chinatown after the 1906 earthquake was led by Look Tin Sing, a prominent Chinese American leader. From 1910 to 1930, he was a crew agent for recruiting Chinese laborers for the steamship companies. To prevent Chinatown from being located to Hunters

Point, he was able to quickly secure enough resources to rebuild Chinatown in an “Oriental” style in hopes to promote tourism and social change. He was the leader and the public-face who was responsible for the post-quake rebuilding of Chinatown. Through his leadership and dedication, the reconstruction of the post-quake Chinatown was completed in 1908, which also included the construction of the building for Far East Café, where it still stands today. More importantly, the completion for reconstruction of Chinatown finished a year ahead of the rest of the city of San Francisco.

e. How does the business demonstrate its commitment to the community?

Far East Café purchases its ingredients through other merchants within the community, supporting each other and allowing the businesses within the community to thrive together.

The owner, Bill Lee, is much involved within the community, and he has gained the respect of not only community leaders within Chinatown, but also of local government leaders. He has been involved in multiple political campaigns, community venues including the Chinese New Year parade, Miss SF Chinatown Pageant, street fairs, and various community celebrations. Far East Café has acted as a social hub for such events and occasions. He continues to be an advocate for this community, in hopes to preserve its traditions and culture, carrying that forward for future generations.

The restaurant also provides opportunities to many new immigrants searching for jobs and looking for new opportunities. The restaurant teaches them new skills and is a stepping stone for those who want to advance their careers.

f. Provide a description of the community the business serves.

Far East Café is gathering place for the Chinatown community. This is the last restaurant in Chinatown that still serves banquet style meals, while New Asia Restaurant is currently closed and is scheduled to become a residential high-rise. Food is a major component in the Chinese culture, as they celebrate special events such as weddings and holidays by having large gatherings serving different dishes for different occasions. Many of its customer base are from the Chinatown community, but the restaurant also attracts many tourists to the establishment.

g. Is the business associated with a culturally significant building/structure/site/object/interior?

This two-story brick commercial building features the typical Oriental-style architecture in post-earthquake Chinatown. The terracotta roof with upturned eave ends give the building a magnificent and imposing Oriental effect. Influenced by classical architecture, Georgian cornices with block medallions were placed underneath the curving gabled roof. The facade of the second floor featured paired windows encased by plain pilasters with triangular capitals.

The interior contains the original booths, Chinese kingfisher lanterns from the Qing Dynasty, and original Chinese paintings from the 1910s. A unique feature is the private wood dining

compartments on one side of the dining room (that matches the wood paneling on the opposite side), which are the last in any Chinese restaurant in the city.

h. How would the community be diminished if the business were to be sold, relocated, shut down, etc.?

If Far East Café closes, there would be a huge impact within the community. One of the key components to preserving the Chinese culture and traditions is to be able to provide the necessities that brings the community together. Far East Café is able to serve the community with their abilities to provide traditional experiences and food that represents the culture. The loss of Far East Café would take away the ability for community members to congregate and reunite with family and friends through the numerous banquets the restaurant hosts throughout the year. It would also take away opportunities from new immigrants in search of jobs that allow them to learn new skills. Allowing this establishment to close would not just be the closing of a single restaurant, it would be the removal of a big piece of the Chinatown community.

CRITERION 3

a. Describe the business and the essential features that define its character.

Far East Café first opened its doors for business in 1920. As you step into the restaurant through the enchanted dragon gateway, you will experience the grandeur of the Orient as you gaze up on the antique palace chandeliers that beautifully light up the painted murals and carved screens. The chandeliers hang gracefully from the elevated ceilings, and the interior murals bring color and liveliness to the walls. These delicate ancient artworks were brought over from China over a hundred years ago. They are also the only restaurant in Chinatown that have private booths for you to enjoy your dining experience.

Far East Café has been serving both locals and visitors fresh Cantonese and Szechwan cuisine since the restaurant's opening. Two full-service bars are located in a private, separated part of the restaurant. The interior of Far East Café is adorned with antique Chinese artwork that dates back over a hundred years. Far East Café's grand ballroom has been a popular destination place for hosting receptions, banquets, special events, and business meetings for both the Chinatown community and San Franciscans at large for generations.

b. How does the business demonstrate a commitment to maintaining the historical traditions that define the business, and which of these traditions should not be changed in order to retain the businesses historical character? (e.g., business model, goods and services, craft, culinary, or art forms)

Far East Café is committed to maintaining its historical tradition as one of the last restaurants in the community that has the ability and capacity to host large banquets serving traditional Cantonese cuisine.

c. How has the business demonstrated a commitment to maintaining the special physical features that define the business? Describe any special exterior and interior physical characteristics of the space occupied by the business (e.g. signage, murals, architectural details, neon signs, etc.).

This two-story brick commercial building features the typical Oriental-style architecture in post-earthquake Chinatown. The terracotta roof with upturned eave ends give the building a magnificent and imposing Oriental effect. Influenced by classical architecture, Georgian cornices with block medallions were placed underneath the curving gabled roof. The facade of the second floor featured paired windows encased by plain pilasters with triangular capitals. The interior contains the original booths, Chinese kingfisher lanterns from the Qing Dynasty, and Chinese paintings from the 1910s.

d. When the current ownership is not the original owner and has owned the business for less than 30 years; the applicant will need to provide documentation that demonstrates the current owner has maintained the physical features or traditions that define the business, including craft, culinary, or art forms. Please use the list of supplemental documents and/or materials as a guide to help demonstrate the existence of the business prior to current ownership.

Documentation that demonstrates the business has been a restaurant for 30+ years is included in this Legacy Business Registry application.



Figure 1. Far East Café, 1910
(*The Architect and Engineer of California and the Pacific Coast*, May 1910)



Figure 2. Far East Café, 1913
(California State Library, California History Section Picture Catalog)



Figure 3. Far East Café at Present



Far East

康年海鮮酒家

SEAFOOD
RESTAURANT

Luggage
15-799-99 2

Chinese
Cuisine
Dim Sum



康年海鮮酒家

FAR EAST
CAFE

康年
FAR EAST CAFE

康年
FAR EAST CAFE







Figure 7. Family Portrait of Herbert Chu by the Chinese Archway, circa 1950
(Herbert Chu)



Figure 8. Cornices and Capitals inside the Far East Café, 2020



Figure 9. Kingfisher Lantern at Far East Café, 2020



Figure 10. Closeup of A Qing Dynasty Kingfisher Lantern, 2020







HERITAGE



news

FOR MEMBERS OF SAN FRANCISCO HERITAGE



Ingleside Sundial c. 1914.
San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library

VOLUME 1 | NO. 1

JANUARY-MARCH 2022

TIME TO LOOK BACK...AND FORWARD

In this issue we review our work in 2021 and look ahead to 2022, including city landmark designation of the 108-year-old Sundial Park in Ingleside Terraces. [STORY ON PAGE 8](#)

IN THIS ISSUE 2. VICE PRESIDENT OF ADVOCACY'S COLUMN 3. HERITAGE ARCHIVES 4. ADVOCACY
8. HAAS-LILIENTHAL HOUSE/DOOLAN-LARSON BUILDING 10. WHAT'S IN STORE FOR 2022 11. EQUITY REPORT CARD
12. CALENDAR OF EVENTS

[View Past Issues](#)

Legacy Business Spotlight: Mauna Loa, Far East Café, and Anchor Brewing Company



View of Grant Avenue in 1964 with Far East Café on left. Photo courtesy of the San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

631 Grant Avenue

Type: Restaurant & Bar

Established: 1920

www.fareastcafesf.com/

Far East Café has been serving both locals and visitors fresh Cantonese and Szechwan cuisine since the restaurant's opening in 1920. The restaurant is located right in the heart of Chinatown, just two blocks away from the Gateway of Chinatown and directly across the street from Old St. Mary's Church. Far East Café is the only restaurant in Chinatown that offers private seating with elegant, mahogany curtained booths. Traditional dim sum is served at lunchtime, and in the evenings dinner is served in the stunningly ornate dining room. Two full-service bars are located in a private, separated part of the restaurant. The interior of Far East Café is adorned with antique Chinese artwork that dates back over a hundred years. Oriental chandeliers hang gracefully from the elevated ceilings, and interior murals bring color and liveliness to the walls. Far East Café's grand ballroom has been a popular destination place for hosting receptions, banquets, special events, and business meetings for both the Chinatown community and San Franciscans at large for generations.

Page 1

Bill of Fare

Choy Sum Gai Pin... 1.10 菜心雞片 Roasted Chicken Cooked with Green Vapour	
Hung Yen Gai Ding... 1.25 杏仁雞丁 Chicken with Dried Chicken, Roasted Shrimp, Celery and Onions	
Mai Gai Gai Que... 1.50 度度雞球 Roasted Chicken Cooked with Green Onions, Roasted Shrimp, White Mushrooms	
Yu Tse Gai... 1.50 炸子雞 Roasted Chicken with Special Sauce	
Biu Ap... 2.10 燒鴨 Roast Duck	
Yu Lu Pui Gai... 3.50 燒雞神掌 Pineapple with Spaghetti	
Shin Pak Oy, Current Prices 燒白鴨 Fried Spatch	
Chow Gai Pin... 1.75 炒雞片 Roasted Chicken Cooked with Roasted Shrimp, Onions, Celery and Water Chestnuts	
Chow Ap Pin... 1.75 炒鴨片 Same as above using Duck instead of Chicken	
Chow Pak Oy Pin... 1.75 炒白鴨片 Same as above only using Spatch	
Kail Gai... 1.75 煎孝雞 Chicken Cooked with Curry	
Pala Ap Pin... 1.75 拔蘭鴨片 Fried Car Duck Cooked with Pineapple	

Pala Gai Pin... 1.50 拔蘭鴨片 Roasted Chicken Cooked with Pineapple	
Sat Wai Ap... 4.25 青蒜鴨 Wild Duck Stewed with Peas, Corn, and	
Wah Su Ap... 4.25 宜絲鴨 Half Pea Roast Duck Cooked with Almond and Curry	
Dot Gai Sum Ma... 1.00 大雞三味 Chicken cooked in three different styles	
Dot Ap Sum Ma... 5.00 大雞三味 Same as above only using Duck instead of Chicken	

WON TON 雲吞

(Chinese Ravioli)

Wan Ton... 35 叉燒雲吞 Ravioli in Soup with Roast Pork	
Chicken Wan Ton... 45 雞肉雲吞 Ravioli in Soup with Chicken	
Duck Wan Ton... 45 鴨肉雲吞 Ravioli in Soup with Duck	
Chop Sui Wan Ton... 50 蔥拌雲吞 Ravioli in Soup with Chop Sui	
Wah Wan Ton... 壹圓 50 Ravioli with Chicken, Roast Pork, Water Chestnuts, Roasted Shrimp, and	
Beef... 30	
Shrimp... 1.20	
Lemon... 1.75	
Jow Wan Ton... 炸雲吞 Fried Ravioli in Peppery Sauce	
Beef... 30	
Shrimp... 1.20	
Lemon... 1.75	

Bill of Fare

Page 2

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Undated menu courtesy of ebay.com

Amidst the backdrop of rapid development in San Francisco, many of longtime banquet halls in Chinatown similar to Far East have closed. **Far East remains only one of only two of the neighborhood's five large banquet spaces still open (the other is New Asia Restaurant), with others like Empress of China being replaced by pricier and more upscale destinations that primarily serve people from outside of the neighborhood.** However, these new restaurants are run by local and (arguably) talented Asian American chefs like Brandon Jew, who are bringing new and innovative takes on traditional Chinese food. [Read the SF Chronicle's recent article](#) profiling the loss of Chinatown's banquet halls, and the debate over the district's future.

FAR EAST CAFÉ

Since 1920

The staffs and management of the Far East Café welcome you into this enchanting restaurant that bring you back in time. Experience dining as it was once enjoyed by the people of ancient China. We serve fine Cantonese and Szechuan cuisine. Whether home style or fine cuisine, dining at the Far East Café is a delightfully memorable experience.

This historic Chinatown landmark was first built in 1908 after the 1906

San Francisco earthquake. One of the few structures that survived the quake is the old St. Mary's Church located directly across the street from this restaurant.

The Far East Café first opened its doors for business in 1920. As you step into the restaurant through the enchanted dragon gateway, you will experience the grandeur of the Orient as you gaze up on the antique palace chandeliers that beautifully light up the painted murals and carved screens. These delicate ancient artworks were brought over from China over a hundred years ago. We are also the only restaurant in Chinatown that have private booths for you to enjoy your dining experience.

We welcome you to come in to taste the fine food of the Far East Café—certainly an experience that no visitor should miss while visiting Chinatown.

BILL LEE



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ITALIAN

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S. F.'s Finest Spanish Entertainment. Spanish
Orchestra. Entertainers. Reminiscent of Old
Spain. Floor Show, Dancing, Friday, Saturday
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TRY OUR DELIGHTFULLY DIFFERENT
SPANISH DINNERS

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Finest Chinese Restaurant on the
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Accommodations for 2 or 200

Afternoon Tea from 2 to 5 p. m.

Luxury Dining at Popular Prices

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Italian Dinners • Private Booths
S. F.'s Most Delicious 75c Dinner • Daily and Sunday
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BERNSTEIN'S FISH GROTTO

LOBSTER DINNER 1.00

9 delicious courses

123 POWELL STREET

CHINESE NIGHT CLUB

Dine—Dance—See the Only All Chinese Girl Revue in the World!

FORBIDDEN CITY

363 SUTTER—NEAR STOCKTON

Cocktail Time from 4:00 P. M.—Hot
Lions d'Oeuvres—Chinese Fried Shrimp

Delicious Chinese or
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SERVED FROM
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No Cover Charge

LATIN-AMERICAN NITE CLUB

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Famous for Cocktails. Anita and Oroysco, famous
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Dolly, mistress of ceremonies

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Particular people Eat & Enjoy our
Hamburgers on French
bread, chicken liver sauce
and scaloppini.

CHINESE COCKTAIL LOUNGE

LIP O

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PETE WONG EDNA BOND
Singing Bartender At the Piano
Hear Them Sing a DUX IN CHINESE

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GIRARDS

65 Ellis St. • FAMOUS FRENCH FOOD.
COCKTAILS, 15c; LUNCH, 35c; DINNER, 50c;
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Good
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FAMOUS ARMENIAN
RESTAURANT
VISIT OUR SUBTLY COCKTAIL LOUNGE

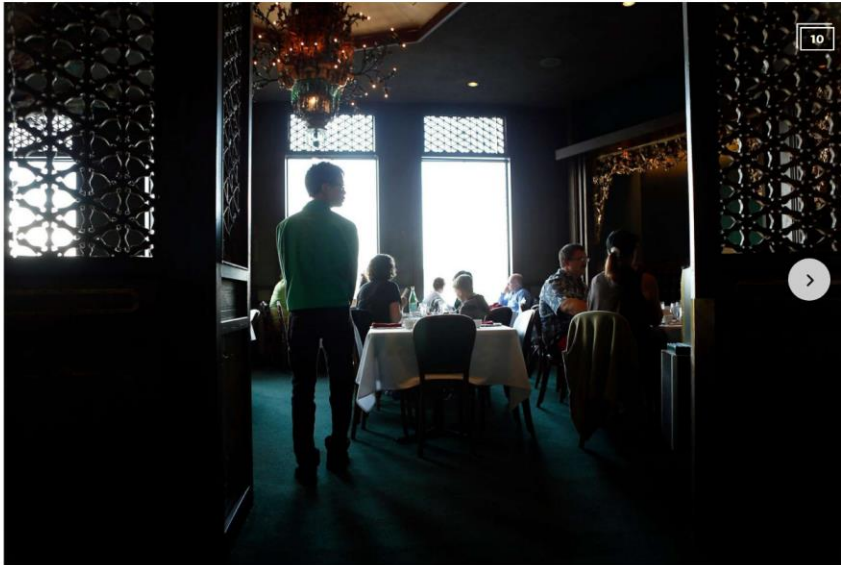
FOOD // RESTAURANTS

SF's Chinatown community fears incoming restaurant could bring gentrification



Janelle Bitker

Feb. 17, 2020 | Updated: Feb. 21, 2020 1:30 p.m.



1 of 10

Main Dining Room at Empress of China restaurant on Grant Avenue in San Francisco, Calif. on Monday, September 29, 2014.
Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle 2014

Community leaders in San Francisco's Chinatown are worried about a pattern emerging in their neighborhood: Their huge banquet hall restaurants keep closing, only to reopen as upscale establishments primarily serving people who don't live in the area.

For decades, Chinatown had five thriving banquet restaurants that didn't just serve food but also functioned as community centers: Empress of China, Far East Cafe, Four Seas Restaurant, Gold Mountain Restaurant and New Asia Restaurant. Only Far East and New Asia are left.

Michelin-starred restaurant Mister Jiu's replaced Four Seas in 2016. The China Live complex, which includes a \$225 tasting menu from the upstairs restaurant Eight Tables, replaced Gold Mountain one year later. This spring, Empress by Boon is preparing to open in the space Empress of China vacated in 2014. Chef-owner Ho Chee Boon, who was born in Malaysia and has worked at restaurants in Singapore, Hong Kong, London

and New York, is best known as the former executive chef at the international high-end Cantonese restaurant chain Hakkasan.

Empress by Boon promises to be a destination restaurant, with sweeping views of the city and Boon's light, seasonal approach to Cantonese cuisine. Menu prices haven't been finalized, but dinner for two will probably reach \$100.

"The food is probably going to be great," said Malcolm Yeung, deputy director of the Chinatown Community Development Center, a neighborhood advocacy group. "But for who?"

Fearing the sense of loss that Empress by Boon's arrival represents for the community, Yeung filed an appeal with the San Francisco Planning Department, calling into question whether the top two floors of the building should still be used as a restaurant. The hearing was scheduled for Wednesday night but has been postponed.

"It's an opportunity to force the owner into a conversation," Yeung said.



Malcolm Yeung of Chinatown Community Development Center (second from right) readies to lead meeting of Chinatown Arts and Culture Coalition meeting at Far East Cafe in San Francisco, Calif., on Thursday, February 13, 2020.

Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

Boon declined to comment for this story. Building owner John Yee, an immigrant who grew up in Chinatown and purchased the Grant Avenue site for a reported \$17.2 million in 2017, said he is committed to contributing to the community. His goal is for the building's businesses, including Empress by Boon, to be "authentic to the cultural identity of the neighborhood," he wrote in an emailed statement.

While elaborate Chinese wedding banquets have gradually fallen out of favor in the past 20 years, Chinatown's banquet restaurants still host hundreds of gatherings a year for family associations, nonprofits, political events, fundraisers, Lunar New Year luncheons and other celebrations. The typical attendance for such banquets is 500 people — people who now can choose between only Far East and New Asia.

"The number of banquets we hold in Chinatown is stunning — it's still a very vital part of the community," Yeung said.

Tatwina Lee, co-chair of the Chinese Culture Foundation in San Francisco, recalls watching her father's presidential inauguration for a Chinese association at Far East; holding one of her wedding receptions at Four Seas; and celebrating her brother-in-law's wedding at Empress, which, in its heyday, was a favorite spot for such events.

Lee has deep family roots in San Francisco Chinatown, and though she lives in the East Bay, she still loves coming to Chinatown because it feels like home. She brings her children and grandchildren to the neighborhood's historic restaurants to help them feel connected to their culture — and says that more high-end destinations are not going to help. She points to the gentrification of the Mission and worries that Chinatown could look similar if more historic spaces turn into fine dining destinations.

"Sometimes I feel like Chinatown is one or two IPOs away from going the same way," she said.

Beyond the sheer size of these restaurants, affordability is a key reason why they're considered community fixtures. An eight-course meal with bountiful portions for a table of 10 typically starts at \$400.

The banquet restaurants have also historically been important economic forces within Chinatown, hiring people who live in Chinatown — often low-income immigrants looking for their first American job — and sourcing ingredients from the neighborhood's grocers and specialty shops, according to Yeung. He said employees typically eat at other Chinatown restaurants, and customers often spend time in the neighborhood before or after meals.

“We help each other,” said Bill Lee, owner of Far East Cafe. He wonders whether Empress by Boon will be part of the same ecosystem.



Bill Lee, one of the owners of Far East Cafe, poses for a portrait in the restaurant in San Francisco, Calif., on Tuesday, January 22, 2019. Far East Cafe, which is about to celebrate its 100th anniversary, is located at 631 Grant Ave. It serves classic Chinese American and Cantonese food in an era when immigration is changing and restaurants are specializing in regional cuisines from all over China.

Yalonda M. James / The Chronicle 2019

Banquet restaurants are “cultural and economic engines in a way the higher-end restaurants aren’t and can’t be,” Yeung said. “I think it’s an open question whether the people coming to high-end restaurants are doing anything other than Uber-ing in, grabbing a bite and Uber-ing out.”

Building owner Yee doesn’t agree.

“Empress will be a major contributor to the Chinatown ecosystem with its daily purchasing power and by providing new employment opportunities within the community. The restaurant will also draw people to Chinatown, including tourists, who will shop in the local stores and patronize our local businesses,” he said by email.

When Mister Jiu’s and China Live were in the planning stages, Yeung said there were many conversations with the restaurateurs — who both have roots in Chinatown — about their impact and place in the neighborhood. He said there haven’t been such conversations with the team behind Empress by Boon, which is why he filed an appeal with the city.

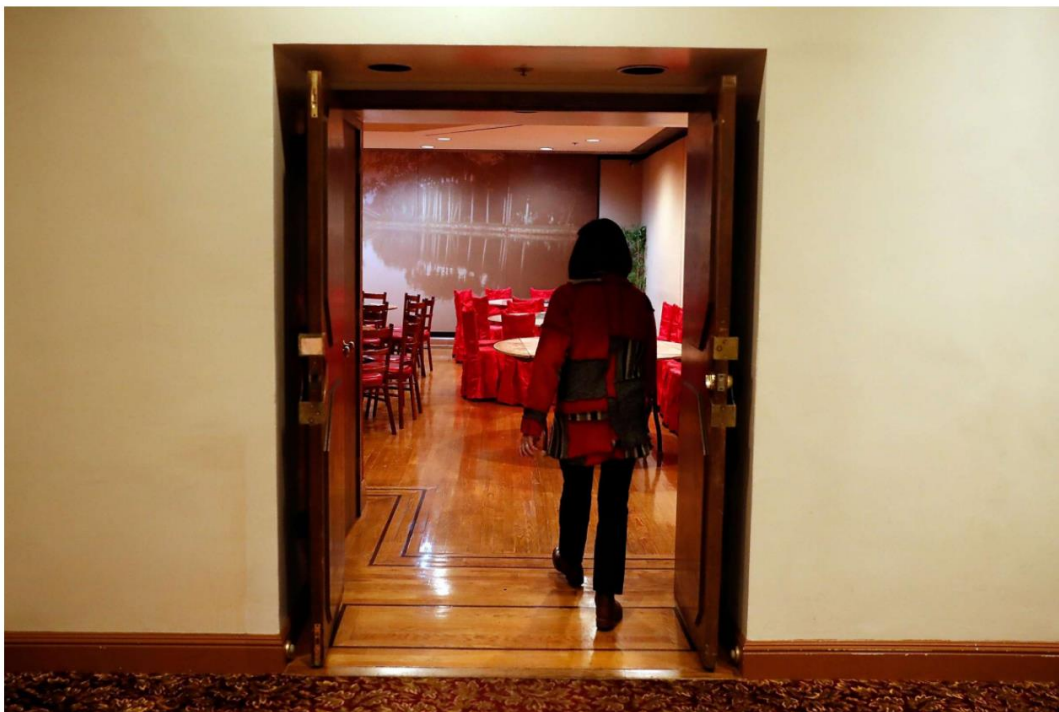
China Live owner George Chen has noticed fewer and fewer people from the neighborhood dining at his restaurant, which is pricier than nearby establishments. But he feels there are other ways to show his Chinatown pride and contribute to the community, such as donating to local causes, hosting events for free and paying staff who live in Chinatown more than minimum wage.

He also established a smaller, 200-person banquet hall on the third floor of China Live but hasn't seen much demand for it.

"I took it on thinking it was the old Gold Mountain, but I kind of wish I didn't," Chen said. "Nobody economically can afford to do it with today's rents."

Yeung wonders whether there could be an affordable banquet component within Empress by Boon. If one of Chinatown's last two banquet restaurants closes, community leaders hope there could be a chance to replace it with a worker-owned co-op, a public-private partnership or something else that hasn't been attempted before.

"Is there a way to make it where you don't have to look at a for-profit model but a community benefit model that would make enough money to run itself?" Tatwina Lee said.



Tatwina Lee of Chinese Culture Foundation enters a small banquet room at Far East Cafe in San Francisco, Calif., on Thursday, February 13, 2020.

Scott Strazzante / The Chronicle

Other Chinatowns across the country are disappearing. In Washington, D.C., the construction of a sports arena ramped up development, and national chains began replacing bubble tea shops. In Los Angeles' Chinatown, gentrification brought hip restaurants slinging trendy items such as Nashville hot chicken in place of dumplings.

According to [a 2013 study](#) from the Asian American Legal Defense and Education Fund, Asians went from being the majority of residents to the minority in Boston, New York and Philadelphia Chinatowns from 1990 to 2010.

"The model of what's happened to other Chinatowns can't be the only answer," said Stephen Gong, the executive director of the Center for Asian American Media in San Francisco. "That it's inevitable."

This story was updated to reflect new information about the Board of Appeals hearing.

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Written By
Janelle Bitker

Reach Janelle on



Janelle Bitker joined The San Francisco Chronicle in 2019. As the food enterprise reporter, she covers restaurant news as well as Bay Area culture at large through a food lens. Previously, she served as a reporter for Eater SF, managing editor at the East Bay Express, and arts & culture editor at the Sacramento News & Review. Her writing has been recognized by the California Newspaper Publishers Association and Association of Alternative Newsmedia.

DINING

Historic Far East Cafe to Close in its 100th Year

Chinatown businesses have been struggling well before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in America.

by [Grace Z. Li](#) • 12/23/2020 1:03 pm - Updated 12/25/2020 10:05 am



The interior of Far East Cafe in Chinatown on Friday, Feb. 21, 2020. (Photo by Kevin N. Hume)

It's a historic year for Far East Cafe, but it will also be its last.

The Chinatown restaurant was going to celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2020 — a massive milestone for a local business that's survived a whole century on Grant Avenue. But owner Bill Lee [told *Wind Newspaper*](#) that the restaurant plans on closing Dec. 31.

The reasons are obvious: The COVID-19 pandemic has decimated the local food industry. On an average day, Far East Cafe gets about 30 takeout orders, according to *Wind Newspaper*.

But Far East Cafe has also faced a challenge unique to Chinese American businesses during the coronavirus era. Well before the pandemic took hold of the United States, Chinatown was already suffering from lost revenue due to a lack of foot traffic. When the virus was raging in Wuhan, China,

As the nation saw a rise in anti-Asian hate crimes, San Francisco's Chinatown saw a drop in business during Lunar New Year, arguably one of their most crucial revenue-making times of the year. Wing Pau, a manager at Far East Cafe, [told SF Weekly in February](#) that over 200 reserved tables were cancelled at the start of 2020, causing the restaurant to lose about \$100,000 in revenue.



Far East Cafe in February 2020. Photo by Grace Z. Li

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And that was before shelter-in-place started.

Chinatown leaders have been calling on the city to provide financial relief to its businesses, arguing that the “impact of COVID-19 on San Francisco’s Chinatown started early and has been particularly severe,” the [SF Chronicle reported](#). On Tuesday, supervisors Aaron Peskin and Sandra Lee Fewer [proposed](#) the Chinatown Restaurant Support and Food Security program, a \$1.9 million plan that, if

100-Year-Old Far East Cafe in SF's Chinatown is saved



By Jay Barmann - Published on March 03, 2021.

San Francisco Chinatown

One of the last vestiges of a long-gone era in San Francisco's Chinatown, the worn-in Far East Cafe (631 Grant Ave.), is remaining open after all, following [an announcement in December](#) that it might have to close.

Far East Cafe owner Bill Lee [told Chinatown's Wind newspaper](#) three months ago that he was reaching a breaking point. "I love Far East Cafe. I don't want to give up," he said. "But I have no choice. We can't afford to keep the restaurant up for running without any revenues from the business and resources from the City."

Fast-forward a couple of months, and the SF Board of Supervisors passed [a \\$1.9 million Chinatown relief measure](#), and Far East Cafe was put to work preparing meals for elderly residents and SROs in the neighborhood.

As the [Chronicle reports](#) via [Sing Tao Daily](#), Lee has decided to keep the place open — and this is also thanks to getting 50% off his rent and six months free rent last year from the landlord.

Far East Cafe will now open along with many other restaurants around the city for indoor dining at 25% capacity — which began Wednesday after SF entered the "Red" tier for reopening on Tuesday.

Also this means that the 100-year-old restaurant's large banquet space is also saved. Community members had said that most of the affordable banquet halls in the neighborhood had closed in recent years, and this would be a major blow if Far East Cafe also closed, leaving one less venue for Lunar New Year banquets, affordable wedding receptions, and other celebrations.

First opened in 1920, Far East Cafe is a high-ceilinged space hung with antique Chinese lanterns, and surrounded by crown molding. The restaurant features private dining booths — that are especially COVID-friendly now — with high wood partitions and curtains separating tables from the rest of the dining room.



LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HEARING DATE: April 6, 2022

Filing Date: March 9, 2022
Case No.: **2022-002235LBR**
Business Name: 631 GRANT AVE
Business Address: 631 Grant Avenue
Zoning: CVR (CHINATOWN- VISITOR RETAIL) Zoning District
50-N Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 0242/002
Applicant: Bill Lee
631 Grant Avenue
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Located In: District 3
Staff Contact: Alessandro Hall – (628) 652-7336
Alessandro.hall@sfgov.org

Recommendation: Adopt a Resolution to Recommend Approval

Business Description

Far East Café is a Chinese restaurant and banquet hall located at 631 Grant Avenue in San Francisco's Chinatown neighborhood. Established in 1920 in an era when banquet halls were quite common, Far East Café is now the last remaining restaurant of its kind in the neighborhood. Little is known about the restaurant's early owners, but it was run by Hing C. Tse from 1979 to 1999. Since then, the restaurant has been owned and operated by Bill Lee, who proudly carries on Far East Café's legacy, ensuring future generations of Chinatown residents have access to a large venue where they can gather and keep traditions alive.

Far East Café has served the Chinatown community for more than a century. Its grand interior and 800-person capacity have made it an ideal venue for almost any special occasion. Over the years it has hosted weddings, community meetings, fundraisers, and holiday celebrations, allowing friends and family to gather around large tables and delight in Cantonese and Szechwan cuisine. When patrons enter through the doorway, they encounter an ornate dining room that features a dragon-shaped gateway, Kingfisher chandeliers from the Qing dynasty,

carved screens, and painted murals. Much of the artwork displayed was brought over from China more than a century ago.

Far East Café is an informal hub of neighborhood community life, where residents gather for events like Lunar New Year and the annual Miss Chinatown Pageant. Over the years, the restaurant has also committed to hiring recent immigrants, teaching them new job skills, and supporting them as they advance in their careers. Additionally, Far East Café purchases its ingredients from local Chinatown merchants, helping to support other local businesses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the restaurant also advocated for the health and safety of the Chinatown community and participated in the Feed & Fuel program, which provided meals for vulnerable residents.

Far East Café is located in a category A (Historic Resource Present) building on the west side of Grant Avenue between California and Sacramento Streets. The building, constructed in 1908, has been identified as an eligible contributor to the National Register-eligible Chinatown Historic District and is associated with the reconstruction of Chinatown following the 1906 Earthquake and Fire. The district is both culturally significant for its association with the Chinese and Chinese American community in San Francisco, as well as architecturally significant for its unique style that blends elements of classical architecture with East Asian motifs. Far East Café is also on the San Francisco Planning Department's Article 10 Landmark Work Program.

Staff Analysis

Review Criteria

1. *When was business founded?*

The business was founded in 1920.

2. *Does the business qualify for listing on the Legacy Business Registry? If so, how?*

Yes. Far East Café qualifies for listing on the Legacy Business Registry because it meets all of the eligibility Criteria:

- a. Far East Café has operated continuously in San Francisco for 102 years.
- b. Far East Café has contributed to the history and identity of the Chinatown neighborhood and San Francisco.
- c. Far East Café is committed to maintaining the physical features and traditions that define the organization.

3. *Is the business associated with a culturally significant art/craft/cuisine/tradition?*

Yes. The business is associated with Cantonese and Szechwan cuisine as well as the tradition of Chinese banquet halls. Additionally, the interior of Far East Café features culturally significant decorations including Kingfisher lanterns from the Qing Dynasty and antique artwork that was brought over from China more than a century ago.

4. *Is the business or its building associated with significant events, persons, and/or architecture?*

Yes. The Grant Avenue property is located within the National Register-eligible Chinatown Historic District. The district is significant for its association with the Chinese and Chinese American community in San Francisco, and for its unique architectural character. The business is also associated with prominent community leader Look Tin Sing, who advocated for the reconstruction of Chinatown and helped define the area's new architectural, commercial, and cultural identity following the 1906 Earthquake and Fire.

5. *Is the property associated with the business listed on a local, state, or federal historic resource registry?*

No. Although the building is not currently listed on a historic resource registry, it is on the Planning Department's Article 10 Landmark Work Program. The property has also been evaluated during several historic resource surveys. As part of the National Register Survey (1997), the property was identified as an eligible contributor to the National Register-eligible Chinatown Historic District and received a survey rating of "3D." During the Chinatown Survey (1994), the property was identified as a district contributor. And in the Foundation for San Francisco Architectural Heritage Survey (1978), the property received a rating of "Major Importance."

6. *Is the business mentioned in a local historic context statement?*

Yes. Far East Café was identified as a candidate for the Legacy Business Registry in a draft of the Chinese American Citywide Historic Context Statement.

7. *Has the business been cited in published literature, newspapers, journals, etc.?*

Yes. Far East Café has been featured in numerous print and online publications including the San Francisco Chronicle and NBC News. The restaurant received extensive coverage when it announced it would close its doors in 2021 due to the difficulty of operating during the COVID-19 pandemic. Luckily, an outpouring of support from the local community and government helped ensure that Far East Café could keep its doors open.

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business

Location(s) associated with the business:

- 631 Grant Avenue (1920 – Present)

Recommended by Applicant

- Exterior architectural features of the building including
 - Terracotta roof with upturned eaves
 - Cornice with block medallions
 - Windows encased by pilasters and triangular capitals
- Interior features including
 - Kingfisher chandeliers from Qing Dynasty
 - Original private dining booths
 - Chinese paintings and murals
 - Dragon gateway
- Capacity to host large banquets serving traditional Cantonese cuisine

Additional Recommended by Staff

- None

Basis for Recommendation

The Department recommends the Historic Preservation Commission adopt a resolution recommending the business listed above be adopted by the Small Business Commission to the Legacy Business Registry.

ATTACHMENTS

Draft Resolution

Legacy Business Registry Application:

- Application Review Sheet
- Section 1 – Business / Applicant Information
- Section 2 – Business Location(s)
- Section 3 – Disclosure Statement
- Section 4 – Written Historical Narrative
 - Criterion 1 – History and Description of Business
 - Criterion 2 – Contribution to Local History
 - Criterion 3 – Business Characteristics
- Contextual Photographs and Background Documentation



HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION RESOLUTION NO. 1233

HEARING DATE: APRIL 6, 2022

Case No.: **2022-002235LBR**
Business Name: Far East Café
Business Address: 631 GRANT AVENUE
Zoning: CVR (CHINATOWN- VISITOR RETAIL) Zoning District
50-N Height and Bulk District
Block/Lot: 0242/002
Applicant: Bill Lee
631 Grant Avenue
Nominated By: Supervisor Aaron Peskin
Located In: District 3
Staff Contact: Alessandro Hall – (628) 652-7336
Alessandro.hall@sfgov.org

ADOPTING FINDINGS RECOMMENDING TO THE SMALL BUSINESS COMMISSION APPROVAL OF THE LEGACY BUSINESS REGISTRY NOMINATION FOR FAR EAST CAFÉ CURRENTLY LOCATED AT 631 GRANT AVE, BLOCK/LOT 0242/002

WHEREAS, in accordance with Administrative Code Section 2A.242, the Office of Small Business maintains a registry of Legacy Businesses in San Francisco (the "Registry") to recognize that longstanding, community-serving businesses can be valuable cultural assets of the City and to be a tool for providing educational and promotional assistance to Legacy Businesses to encourage their continued viability and success; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has operated in San Francisco for 30 or more years, with no break in San Francisco operations exceeding two years; and

WHEREAS, the subject business has contributed to the City's history and identity; and

WHEREAS, the subject business is committed to maintaining the traditions that define the business; and

WHEREAS, at a duly noticed public hearing held on April 6, 2022, the Historic Preservation Commission reviewed documents, correspondence and heard oral testimony on the Legacy Business Registry nomination.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends that Far East Cafe qualifies for the Legacy Business Registry under Administrative Code Section 2A.242(b)(2) as it has operated for 30 or more years and has continued to contribute to the community.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby recommends safeguarding of the below listed physical features and traditions for Far East Cafe.

Location(s):

- 631 Grant Avenue (1920 – Present)

Physical Features or Traditions that Define the Business:

- Exterior architectural features of the building including
 - Terracotta roof with upturned eaves
 - Cornice with block medallions
 - Windows encased by pilasters and triangular capitals
- Interior features including
 - Kingfisher chandeliers from Qing Dynasty
 - Original private dining booths
 - Chinese paintings and murals
 - Dragon gateway
- Capacity to host large banquets serving traditional Cantonese cuisine

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission's findings and recommendations are made solely for the purpose of evaluating the subject business's eligibility for the Legacy Business Registry, and the Historic Preservation Commission makes no finding that the subject property or any of its features constitutes a historical resource pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.5(a).

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Historic Preservation Commission hereby directs its Commission Secretary to transmit this Resolution and other pertinent materials in the case file 2022-002235LBR to the Office of Small Business on April 6, 2022.



Jonas P. Ionin
Commission Secretary

AYES: Wright, Black, Foley, Johns, So, Nageswaran, Matsuda
NOES: None
ABSENT: None
ADOPTED: April 6, 2022